How bikes helped create U.S. highways

By Margaret Guroff

Before there were cars, America's country roads were unpaved, and they were abysmal. Back then, roads were so unreliable for travelers that most state maps didn't even show[1] them. This all started to change when early cyclists came together to transform some U.S. travel routes, and lay the groundwork for the interstate highways we use today.

Through the 1880s, spring and fall rains routinely turned dirt lanes into impassable mud pits that brought rural life to a standstill, stranding farmers at home with their produce and leaving grocers' shelves bare. In the summer, the roads bore deep, sunbaked ruts; in the winter, treacherous ice slicks. The nearby farmers who were responsible for[2] maintaining these roads didn't have the means or desire to pave them, or even to post signs identifying them.

City streets weren't much better. Though many were paved with cobblestones or wood blocks, they were also slashed through with trolley tracks and scattered with trash and horse manure. In 1892, British novelist Rudyard Kipling savaged New York's "slatternly pavement" in a travel essay, calling the city's uneven, stinky streets "first cousins to a Zanzibar foreshore."

But the same ravaged paths that seemed primitive to foreigners like Kipling were normal for Americans. And they might have stayed that way if it hadn't been for bicycles, and cyclists who banded together to lobby for government funding of better roads.

The first bicycle, called a "pedal velocipede," was patented in 1866, and its heavy wood-spoked wheels were no match for

America’s rough roadways. By the late 1870s, though, builders had started making wheels with lightweight wire spokes under tension. This technique, still seen in modern bicycle wheels, allowed makers to enlarge the front driving wheel so that the bike would go farther with each crank of the pedals.

Bikes took on the penny-farthing silhouette: a chest-high front wheel and a knee-high rear wheel. This design made cycles faster and more roadworthy, since the tall wheels’ gentle arcs rolled right over smaller holes in the road.

As soon as American cyclists began riding high-wheelers outdoors, they began kvetching about the roadways. “The majority [of Americans] do not know what a good road is,” wrote one rider in 1882, “and their horses—who do know and could explain the differences in roads—are debarred from speaking.”

Cyclists, however, could speak— and organize. Since high-wheel bicycles cost many times the average tradesman’s weekly wages, they were affordable only to the well-to-do, and the first bicycle clubs were upper-crusty fraternities for racing and socializing.

The groups quickly developed a political agenda, as cyclists had to fight for the right to ride. Police routinely stopped riders and shooed them off city streets, inspiring cyclists to join together and press for access to public thoroughfares. A national coalition of clubs called the League of American Wheelmen (LAW) came to lead these efforts.

Early court cases went against bikers. In 1881, three cyclists who defied a ban on riding in New York’s Central Park were jailed. But the cyclists eventually prevailed, and in 1890, the landmark Kansas case Swift v. Topeka established bicycles as vehicles with the same road rights as any other conveyance.

By then, the bicycle had undergone another transformation. Makers had discovered that by using a chain and sprockets they

could make a wheel rotate more than once with each turn of the pedals. Wheels got smaller again, seats got closer to the ground, and the so-called “safety bicycle” – cushioned by new, air-filled tires – started selling like mad. A safety bicycle looked pretty much like a modern commuter bike, and by the early 1890s, more than a million Americans were riding them. With that many cyclists on the road, the demand for smoother roadways began to go mainstream.

Farmers weren’t on board yet, though. If better roads meant more unpaid work for them, most preferred the status quo. But then cyclists launched a full-bore PR campaign, one of the first of the modern era. Both in books and in a new monthly magazine called “Good Roads”, the LAW made the case to farmers in pocketbook terms.

Because pulling loaded wagons through muck or over ruts required extra horsepower, American farmers owned and fed at least 2 million more horses than they would need if the roads were smooth, LAW official Isaac B. Potter informed his rural reader. “A bad road is really the most expensive thing in your agricultural outfit,” he wrote. Potter argued that farmers deserved a cut of their urban countrymen’s taxes to pay for road paving. Many farmers were convinced, and began to work with cyclists to lobby state and local governments for better roads.

In mid-1892, Col. Albert A. Pope, a leading bicycle manufacturer, printed thousands of copies of a petition demanding that Congress create a federal department to promote “knowledge in the art of constructing and maintaining roads.” He enlisted cyclists’ help to collect signatures and return signed copies, which he pasted into an enormous scroll.

Pope delivered this scroll to the U.S. Capitol in 1893, displaying it on a pair of hand-cranked oak spools that stood 7-feet high. The so-called “monster petition,” now housed in the National Archives, bore 150,000 signatures. That same

year, Congress authorized the creation of the Office of Road Inquiry, a two-man fact-finding operation that was a precursor to the Federal Highway Administration.

In 1896, the U.S. Postal Service further boosted rural support for good roads by launching the first rural free delivery routes. Rather than having to trek miles over iffy roads to the nearest post office to check for mail, farmers could now receive the same daily drop-off service as city residents. The catch was that the postmaster would authorize home delivery only if the local roads were passable, a strong incentive for farmers to see that they were.

As roads improved, city-dwellers increasingly used bikes to explore the flyover country of their day: the terra incognita between railroad stations. Wayside inns that had averaged one guest a week for years were suddenly overrun with wheelmen, some of whom installed signposts and created road maps to help other cyclists find their way.

This didn’t last long, though. By the end of the 1890s, the bicycle boom had collapsed, and fashionable swells had moved on to other passions. Working people in cities still used bikes for commuting or making deliveries, but the touring fad and the power of the bicycle lobby were done. Nevertheless, when automobile tourists took to the roads in large numbers in the 1910s and 1920s, they often found the way marked, mapped, and paved by cyclists who had come before.

The bicycle, meanwhile, was largely erased from America’s roadways. Painted, car-width lanes seemed to leave no space for cycles. The new practice of parking private vehicles along the edges of public roads crowded bikes out of that space. Postwar suburbs separated housing from workplaces by long distances, making bicycle commuting impractical. Late-century exurbs, with their cul-de-sacs and collector roads, maximized driving speeds within developments, which added to the danger of cycling there. Interstate highways, for which early

cyclists are partly responsible, are almost all closed to cyclists.

Now comes a new call for road space for bikes. In the past 10 years, as middle-class Americans have moved back to urban cores—where shorter travel distances make cycling more practical—riders have pressed governments for safer bike routes. And governments have begun to deliver. In the 50 most populous cities, the average mileage of on-street bicycle lanes has doubled since 2007, while nationwide, the number of physically separated bike lanes has more than tripled since 2011, with many more miles in the works.

Some drivers bemoan the loss of asphalt. Much like farmers of the 1880s, they prefer the imperfect status quo to changes they perceive as serving a small, self-regarding elite at their expense. And, much like good-roads lobbyists of the 1880s, it falls upon bicycle advocates to make the case that facilities for cyclists are worth the cost, not only in construction (which tends to be cheap) but also in lost access to part of an existing roadway for driving and parking.

There are strong arguments being made here: More and better bike lanes have been shown to smooth traffic flow and diminish deadly collisions between bikes and cars. They can also help clear the air, reduce the demand for downtown parking, and improve public health by encouraging exercise. But to judge by the furious responses that usually erupt when plans for a new bike lane are announced, those arguments haven’t convinced everyone.

Bicycle advocates are already following the historical example of the League of American Wheelmen by banding together in advocacy groups such as the League of American Bicyclists, a gender-neutral revival of the old organization. Isaac Potter might advise bike lane supporters to seek common cause with their most vocal opponents, stressing the money and time saved for drivers when all road users are safely accommodated.

Another thing Potter might say is that the future is fickle. We may do our best to shape roads that work for all current users, only to find we've paved the way for some new mode of transport that is beyond our imagining.

Margaret Guroff is the author of "The Mechanical Horse: How the Bicycle Reshaped American Life" (2016), from which this essay is adapted. She wrote this for What It Means to Be American, a partnership of the Smithsonian and Zócalo Public Square.

Indoor climbing gym coming to South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

A year from now it might not be necessary to go to Pie Shop or Lovers Leap or any of the other iconic climbing locales around Tahoe. That's because an indoor climbing gym in South Lake Tahoe is in the works.

"My husband and I are both rock climbers. When we moved up here about three years ago one of the first things we noticed is South Lake needs a climbing gym," Gianna Leavers told *Lake Tahoe News.*

She and her husband, Brad, are in the planning phase with Blue Granite Climbing Gym. The hope is by the end of the year to have done what is necessary for the city regarding permits, then hire a contractor and break ground in May, with a fall 2017 opening.

One obstacle they must overcome is getting the necessary

commercial floor area or CFA. CFA is a commodity that the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency created to curb development, but which is now impeding redevelopment and thwarting a free market economy.

The Leavers bought the parcel on Emerald Bay Road where the Tahoe Budget Inn used to be; it was razed in 2007.



This is a rendering provided by Monarch Architecture of what the gym will look like.

The building – which is intended to be built to LEED criteria – will be about 7,600 square feet. According to Monarch Architecture, it will have metal cladding, vertical glass elements and a heavy timber intermediate roof canopy.

To get around the maximum building height of 35 feet, the plan is to excavate some of the dirt in the back so a taller climbing wall – about 40 feet – can be installed.

The pitches will range from slabs, to vertical to overhangs. A smaller wall will be near the entrance, with the idea this will be used to introduce people to the sport, for kids or even groups.

There will be top ropes, leads, bouldering, a yoga room, free weights and cardio equipment.

“One of the aspects that we are interested in as climbers is that we are interested in building a community for the climbers in Tahoe,” Leavers said.

It will be a place for people to hang out as well as meet like-minded individuals.

But it won’t just be for the hard-core climbers to practice their skills. The goal is to make it appealing to all levels – where classes are taught, camps are offered, birthdays are celebrated, and after school programs take place.

Report: Expanding sports betting would generate $11.9B

By Las Vegas Sun

Extending legalized sports betting beyond Nevada and other states where it is currently lawful would create nearly $12 billion in gross gaming revenue in the U.S., says a report from a global gaming analyst.

GamblingCompliance Research Services’ report says the U.S. would become the world’s largest sports-betting market if a federal prohibition on sports wagering were eliminated. Revenue in the U.S. would be $11.9 billion – more than four times the amount of the United Kingdom, home of current leading market. Gross gaming revenue there is $2.8 billion.

Revenue in California alone would be $1.3 billion if legal sports wagering were expanded to tribal casinos, online and noncasino retail outlets, the report said.

Read the whole story

Yosemite to expand by 400 acres

By Louis Sahagun, Los Angeles Times

In its biggest expansion in decades, Yosemite National Park on Wednesday broadened its western boundary by adding 400 acres of lush meadowlands edged with cedars and ponderosa pines that provide habitat for some of California's most threatened wildlife.

The nonprofit Trust for Public Land purchased Ackerson Meadow from private owners for $2.3 million this year and donated it Wednesday to the National Park Service, marking Yosemite National Park's largest addition of untrammeled wilderness in seven decades. Yosemite now stands at roughly 750,000 acres.

The meadows, home to the federally endangered southwestern willow flycatcher and a geographically isolated and genetically distinct clan of roughly 200 great gray owls, were spared by the Rim Fire that scorched a huge swath of the surrounding Sierra Nevada forests in 2013.

Read the whole story

Uphill battle to keep Mt.

Rose locally owned

By Benjamin Spillman, Reno Gazette-Journal

A series of Facebook posts under the name One Reno make a locavore pitch for the future of Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe, the longtime Reno-area ski resort.

“KEEP MOUNT ROSE LOCALLY OWNED,” one all caps post screams.

In the comments under another post announcing a crowdfunding effort One Reno makes a pledge aimed at local skiers and riders who like the down-home feeling of the resort overlooking Reno which management announced in January was for sale.

“We will keep the Mountain locally owned, and never allow it to become McSki-Resort,” One Reno posted in response to a commenter who asked about development plans.

One Reno is the brainchild of Govind Davis, a Reno resident with a background in technology who co-founded a consulting firm called MCF Technology before moving to Nevada.

Davis, who has no ski industry experience, is nonetheless seeking to put together a deal he says would put locals in control of charting a future for Mt. Rose.

Read the whole story

Tahoe bettor wagered $122,000

on college football

By James Crepea, Al.com

Auburn may have lost its season opener with No. 2 Clemson, 19-13, on Saturday but sports books and at least one bettor won big.

ESPN.com reported a bettor at William Hill's sportsbook at the Hyatt in Incline Village wagered $122,000 on Clemson to defeat Auburn straight-up at a moneyline bet of minus-320. Clemson's victory returned $38,125 for the unnamed bettor.

Auburn was a 7.5-point underdog for most of the week and closed at plus-9, according to VegasInsider.com, with some books favoring Clemson by eight points.

Read the whole story

Rare stonefly only found in Lake Tahoe



This stonefly has only been found living beneath the surface of Lake Tahoe. Photo/UNR

By Emily Benson, New Scientist

Species: *Capnia lacustra*

Habitat: Lake Tahoe, 100 to 280 feet below the lake's surface.

An autumn birthday means one of these rare aquatic insects was born live; but a spring birthday bash means it probably hatched from an egg.

The insect, a species of stonefly called *Capnia lacustra*, is one of 10 invertebrate species found only on the bed of Lake Tahoe.

And it is one of a kind among stoneflies. Most species in this group live in streams or rivers as juveniles, before emerging into the air as winged adults to mate and lay eggs. *C. lacustra* has a different strategy: it's the only known species of stonefly that spends its entire life under water, never

developing wings.

The creatures' rarity and difficult-to-reach habitat make them hard to study. A lakewide survey in 2008 and 2009 revealed that *C. lacustra* – and the particular plant it lives on – appears to be much scarcer in Lake Tahoe now than in the 1960s.

Read the whole story

Nev. sports books going after cheaters

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Review-Journal

It's been well-documented that the best people to ferret out sports cheats and game fixes are employed by Nevada's legal sports books.

After all, they have a financial interest in the outcome of every race, match and meet posted in their books. If the fix is in and a player or players are under the influence of gamblers looking to make a quick score by collaborating with an athlete who doesn't play up to his ability, the sports books are the ones that would take the financial hit.

Weeks after the NHL announced that it was awarding Las Vegas its first major-league franchise, it also said that it would incorporate Sportradar's fraud detection system into its game-integrity protection package.

Instead of 64 Southern Nevada race and sports books paying attention to odd wagering patterns in a sport that doesn't get a whole lot of attention at the betting window, there are 550

sports wagering operations worldwide processing data in real time.

Read the whole story

Bird walks to highlight annual migration

Migration brings a variety of birds through the Lake Tahoe Basin as migrant birds head south for winter.
Tahoe Institute for Natural Science is hosting two walks to see the migrating birds.
Kirk Hardie will lead an easy stroll around Spooner Lake and through a variety of habitats in search of migrant birds on Sept. 17, 8:30-11:30am. Go online to register for the free event.
On Sept 18 from 9-11am, Rich Chambers, an avid birdwatcher and TINS board member, will leads a birding adventure in Rabe Meadow in Stateline. To sign up for the free walk, go online.

Nev. silver history comes to life in backcountry



The bullwheel from the Comstock era is still near Incline Village. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – Listen closely; echoes of the past seem to whisper through the pines. Is it the call of men hauling up timber from below? Or perhaps the sound of lumber splashing into the flumes?

Tucked in a remote area above Incline Village are remnants of Lake Tahoe's storied Comstock era.

Nevada State Parks Ranger Jay Howard last month led a group of about 20 people on a excursion that was part 4-wheel drive, part hiking to see what remains of life during the mid- to late 1800s. This was when the trees of Tahoe were felled to build the mines of Virginia City.



The V flume took logs through the mountains for the mines in Virginia City. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Conservation and environmentalism weren't part of the vernacular. Clear cutting and greed were the norm. But so were innovation and entrepreneurship.

Where the old Ponderosa Ranch was, next to Tunnel Creek Café and where the parking lot for new bike trail is being built was a mill. This is where the logs were cut into appropriate lengths that would be used in the silver mines, some of which were 3,000-feet deep.

This process started before railroads were in the basin and long before motor vehicles.

While the timber and water companies were separately owned, they worked in conjunction. An elaborate flume system transported the wood to the Washoe Valley, which was then hauled first by oxen to Virginia City and then by the V&T rail

line.



Views in the area are stunning. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Virginia City was bustling with 30,000 people; today the population is less than 1,000. It didn’t have water until Aug. 1, 1973, when the flume system brought it.

Through ingenuity the whole process became industrialized – at least as much as it could for the time period and location.

From the Incline mill two sets of tracks were laid going straight up, nearly 1,400 feet. A bullwheel built by Sierra Nevada Lumber Company in 1880 at the top spun the cable to bring up the carts of wood that could each hold about a half a cord.

Wood and steel from the 12-foot bullwheel are still in the forest. The wheel, while rusted, looks like it might still work.



Debris from the logging operation is scattered in the woods. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Until recently this was on private land owned by David Duffield. Now the U.S. Forest Service owns it. Duffield paid for a study to be done on the bullwheel so when the government has money it can be properly restored. Only a handful of photos exist of what it looked like during operation.

Just below this, at an elevation of 7,670 feet, is where the V flume started. This is where the wood was unloaded.

Water for the flumes was diverted from nearby creeks and natural springs. Between 4 and 6 inches of water was needed to float the logs. The V shape was used so if there were a jam, the water would rise and naturally free the logs. (Box flumes were used just to carry water.)

Gravity allowed the logs to float to and through a tunnel that had been built not too far away.

Part of the tour was seeing where this nearly three-quarter mile long tunnel once was. It collapsed in 1957. Today it would be hard to know it was there without a guide to point to it.

While Howard touched on the Marlette and Hobart water systems, state park rangers give separate tours specifically about water.

Throughout the trek Howard was throwing out dates, names and locations, plus he had old black and white photos from the era. It’s a fairly thorough lesson in Nevada history that he delivers in a matter of a few hours.